

Vermont Telecommunications Plan

SEPTEMBER 2004



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Preface

This edition of the *Vermont Telecommunications Plan* is a milestone in a process that began more than two years ago. It is a process that has tapped the knowledge, opinion, ideas, and critical thinking of hundreds of people who represent themselves or one of a wide range of organizations. Although this draft represents the voice of the Public Service Department (PSD) and not any particular participant in the input process, the contributions of all who assisted the PSD to date have been invaluable. It has been up to the PSD to use the information and analysis available to it to come up with a document that addresses the public interest as a whole. This document is a successor to a “Public Comment Draft” issued in March of 2004 and a “Final Draft” issued in June 2004. Both of these drafts were revised after consideration of comments received by the PSD at six public hearings held in April and July, and various written comments. This edition of the *Vermont Telecommunications Plan* is the fourth, following editions released in 1992, 1996, and 2000 and therefore “v. 4.0” has been added to the title at the bottom of each page. This document supplants the 2000 edition as the official, adopted version of the *Vermont Telecommunications Plan*.

The *Plan* as written is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all possible policies or desirable actions with regard to telecommunications in Vermont. Changes in circumstances, unforeseen events, and other contingencies may require actions by the State and others that are different from those envisioned by the *Plan*. Nevertheless, the *Plan* does represent a serious effort to identify and prepare guidance for dealing with important issues that will affect the provision and use of telecommunications in Vermont in the future.



A Look into the Future

Telecommunications in Vermont has come very far in a relatively short time. Twenty-five years ago most people got basic phone service from “Ma Bell,” long distance calling was expensive, and many Vermonters were lucky if they could pull in a few television stations over the air. Ten years ago, cellular phones were often “car phones” and only a small minority of Vermonters had them. Meanwhile, a few brave souls were just starting to figure out how they could bring something called the Internet to their homes. How could advances in telecommunications impact Vermonters’ everyday lives in the future? Here are just some of the possibilities.

- ▶ Imagine that a majority of Vermonters don’t use conventional wired phones or cellular phones anymore but instead use personal wireless phones that pull their Internet-based phone service wirelessly off of whatever Internet connection is available where they are at the time. This could be their home broadband connection and wireless home network, a data-enabled cellular network when they are on the road, or a public wireless broadband “hot spot” in a local downtown.
- ▶ Broadband service matures to the point that high-quality streaming video services, like high-quality streaming audio services today, become widely available. Instead of a few cable or satellite video tiers with similar programming packages, there are a wide variety of subscription video services selling a variety of programming packages to customers. Personal Video Recorders become storehouses of downloaded audio and video content available on demand.
- ▶ The amount and quality of on-line educational content available to Vermonters from around the world grows in quantity and quality. Broadband services allow Vermonters to access rich educational content that uses video, audio, text, real-time communication and stored material as appropriate. This gives Vermonters of all ages greater access to customized learning opportunities that meet their specific needs. Furthermore, Vermont is able to leverage its high per-capita level of higher education institutions to become a provider of on-line education to the world. Vermont institutions combine on-line opportunities with the state’s special natural and learning environments to entice students of all ages to come to Vermont for low-residency education programs.
- ▶ Electronic medical records allow Vermonters to have ownership of their own personal health record and share it as needed with their health care providers. Linking one’s health care providers to home health monitoring devices and to personal health observation diaries becomes more feasible and effective because data communications services are so prevalent in the home. Providers and patients are better have better tools for deciding what care is needed, and what is not.
- ▶ High-speed telecommunications tear down barriers for Vermont businesses and workers to interact with the world while being located in Vermont. Vermont is better able to market itself as a place that has motivated

employees who value the high quality of life in the Green Mountain State. Vacationers are able to stay in touch on their wireless phones and other communications devices, while visiting business people talk about how they can move their businesses and new jobs to the state they enjoy visiting so much.

- Always-on, affordable, convenient, Internet access becomes so widespread that electronic transactions become the norm at work and in Vermonters' personal lives. Vermonters routinely get "on-line, not in line" not only for renewing a driver's license and filing taxes but also for everything from taking out a business loan to applying for an local zoning permit.

Like any look into the future, things are not likely to turn out exactly as described here, and there will be surprises. As the universal desire to communicate finds new ways to express itself, life in Vermont will continue to evolve as it has in the past. It is up to Vermonters to make the most of that evolution.